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TAGS: [EAID](#) [ENRG](#) [EPET](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: SCO: NO PLANS TO EXPAND, BUT GETTING INVOLVED IN
REGION

REF: A. (A) MOSCOW 3996
[1](#)B. (B) MOSCOW 4141

MOSCOW 00004185 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Leonid Moisev, President Putin's envoy to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), confirmed that the organization has no plans to expand any time soon and maintained that the SCO would remain an economic club, rather than a military alliance. Experts agreed, telling us that taking in potential new members such as Iran and India would destabilize the organization, further strain relations among the current member states, and damage relations with the West. Russia's aid to Kyrgyzstan reflects some of the strain in the organization, as it is intended to counteract Chinese and Kazakh influence in the country, rather than compete with funds from the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Russia also would like to help Afghanistan secure its borders but does not want a secure Afghanistan to become a rival transshipment point for Central Asian electricity and gas. END SUMMARY.

The Official Line: Iran Will Not Join SCO

[1](#)2. (SBU) Leonid Moisev, who serves as President Putin's Special Representative to the SCO, National Coordinator for SCO Affairs, and Ambassador at-large, stated in an off-the-record August 23 briefing at the MFA that, contrary to news and other reports, the SCO will not expand any time soon. "The SCO must consolidate the nucleus of the organization first. New members would mean new problems. Perhaps when the organization is stronger it can absorb new members," he argued. Moisev went on, saying much goodwill has been built up as the members agreed on issues such as procedures for meetings, and the organization does not wish to jeopardize that. He argued expanding the SCO would be a "setback."

SCO To Remain Economic Organization

[1](#)3. (C) Moisev stated that the defense ministries of SCO member states almost never cooperate because the organization "will never become a military organization." He said it was a relief that the Peace Mission 2007 anti-terrorist exercises took place at all because of the numerous technical and logistical hurdles, such as the negotiation of SOFAs, that needed to be cleared. He stated the SCO wants to conduct regular exercises, but not every year and not on the scale of Peace Mission 2007 (ref A).

The Experts Agree

14. (C) Victor Litovkin, Assistant Editor of the online journal "Independent Military Overview," told us much the same in an August 17 meeting. He said perhaps Turkmenistan and Mongolia could join the SCO without causing many problems, but observer states Iran, Pakistan, and India should not expect to join any time soon. China opposes allowing India to join, and the U.S. and NATO would be upset if Iran joined, he opined. If the SCO took in Pakistan and not India, he added, the Indians would object. Litovkin, however, predicted that if Ukraine joined NATO, then Russia would push for Iran to join the SCO.

15. (C) Ivan Safranchuk, Director of the World Security Institute, told us on August 22 (ref A) that the SCO would not accept new members because Russia and China do not want to risk diluting their dominance of the organization. China, he said, is already frustrated by its inability to control the SCO agenda, and new members would only make matters worse for them. He also argued that the SCO member states do not want Iran to join because the organization "does not wish to accept responsibility for Iran's actions." He also cautioned that allowing Iran to join would undermine the legitimacy of the SCO.

16. (C) Andrey Grozin, Head of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan Department of the CIS Institute, told us on August 21 (ref B) the SCO is already "struggling to find its purpose." Adding more members at this time would only make the situation murkier and render the SCO ineffective.

Russia's Aid To Kyrgyzstan

MOSCOW 00004185 002.2 OF 002

17. (C) Safranchuk told us on August 22 that he believes Putin's announcement of 2 billion USD in aid for Kyrgyzstan is intended to counteract Kazakh and Chinese influence in the country. According to Safranchuk, Russia is concerned about China's and Kazakhstan's growing influence in the region and wants to regain its traditional dominance. Safranchuk predicted the money would be invested in hydroelectric power and mining because these are the most developed parts of the Kyrgyz economy. Grozin agreed, adding that this investment was not being made in response to the Millennium Challenge Corporation's recent investment in Kyrgyzstan.

A Secure Afghanistan, But Not Too Secure

18. (C) Grozin told us that the SCO's plan to convene a conference on Afghanistan would not result in much action because the security situation would deter member states from engaging at this time. In addition, Safranchuk noted the tension inherent in Russian efforts to promote stability and enhance counter-narcotics programs. "Too much" stability might tempt Central Asian states to start selling electricity and perhaps even gas to India and Pakistan via a stable Afghanistan, he argued, thus depriving Russia of the leverage it enjoys as Central Asia's main market. Safranchuk added that any money pledged by the SCO would probably go to securing Afghanistan's borders and developing industry and education.

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